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THE SHAKESPEARE ASSOCIATION

THE BEGINNINGS OF THE  
ENGLISH SECULAR AND  
ROMANTIC DRAMA

BY

ARTHUR W. REED, M.A.

LONDON

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THE BEGINNINGS OF THE ENGLISH  
SECULAR AND ROMANTIC DRAMA

A PAPER READ BEFORE THE SHAKESPEARE  
ASSOCIATION ON FRIDAY, FEBRUARY 29, 1920.

BY

ARTHUR W. REED, M.A.





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## THE BEGINNINGS OF THE ENGLISH SECULAR AND ROMANTIC DRAMA.

**I**N an article in 'THE LIBRARY' of January, 1919, on *John Rastell's Plays*, I expressed the opinion that the break with the tradition of the allegorical morality and the rise of the freer kind of imaginative drama were connected in a remarkable way with a group of men of whom Sir Thomas More is perhaps the best known to you. I added that this movement towards dramatic freedom began in the household in which More spent part of his boyhood, the household of Cardinal Morton. I hope to follow up and justify this suggestion to-night.

Students of the early Tudor Drama are familiar with the fact that the most interesting and original plays printed during the reign of Henry VIII came from the presses of a father and son, John and William Rastell. This bibliographical fact has much significance in the story of the origins of the Tudor Drama, and the investigation of the circumstances that lie behind it opens the way to conclusions of some importance for the historians of literature. John Rastell was More's brother-in-law, and William Rastell is well known as the editor of More's English works.

An attempt has been made in recent years entirely to restate the problem of the early Tudor Drama by Dr. C. W. Wallace, whose *Evolution of the English Drama* postulates, curiously, not evolution, but a 'square break.' Dr. Wallace finds in the literary musician, William Cornyshe, the great originator. He claims that Cornyshe is the author of *The Four P P*, *The Pardonere and Frere* and *Johan Johan*, a trilogy of plays

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traditionally assigned to John Heywood. He claims further that Cornyshe was the only dramatist living who had 'opportunity, impetus or skill' to write in the new manner three other plays, *Gentleness and Nobility*, *The Four Elements* and *Calisto and Melibœa*. If we add to this list of plays, assigned by Dr. Wallace to Cornyshe, the newly-discovered *Fulgens and Lucres*, we have all of the plays of which I shall have to speak; and it should be remarked that six of the seven were printed by the Rastells, whilst it has been suggested by Mr. A. W. Pollard as probable that there was a Rastell edition, now lost, of the seventh, *The Four P P*.

Cornyshe, who is called by his protestant, the octavian Shakespeare, was master of the boys of the Chapel Royal during the earlier years of the reign of Henry VIII. He is prominent in the Revels Accounts of the earlier years of the sixteenth century, but his place in history lies in the story, not of the popular drama, but of that extravagant medley of music, pageantry and dance, the Court masque. The attribution of six plays to a definite dramatist on the sole ground that he alone of all Englishmen then living was capable of writing them is not likely, I think, to secure a good foundation for a study of the evolution of the drama. 'No other dramatist,' Dr. Wallace says, 'but the impossible Medwall was then writing.'<sup>1</sup>

It is 'the impossible Medwall,' however, who has now to be put in the place of honour at the head of the line of Tudor dramatists. In dismissing Medwall to make room for Cornyshe, Dr. Wallace was apparently misled by Payne Collier whose very circumstantial and graphic illustration of Medwall's dullness he accepted without, it seems, examining the document at the Record Office in which it was said to be found. The anecdote which

<sup>1</sup> This question is discussed more fully in my studies on 'John Heywood and His Friends' and 'The Canon of John Heywood's Plays' (Alexander Moring).

occurs in Collier's 'History of Dramatic Poetry' (p. 69) gives an account, now widely circulated, of the failure of a lost play by Medwall, called, not without irony, *The Fyndyng of Troth*.

Quoting from a Chapter House Roll of Revels Accounts, Collier shows items for costumes for Venus, Beauty, a Fool, and ladies and gentlemen who took part in the entertainments at Richmond in 1513. These entries, correctly transcribed by Collier, are to be found at the Record Office in a large bound volume, which bears on each leaf the punctures of roll stitching (Misc. Books, Exch. T.R. 217). But according to Collier, there was 'a singular paper folded up in the roll' giving an account of two interludes performed on this occasion, one by William Cornyshe entitled, *The Tryumpe of Love and Beauty*, in which Venus and Beauty took part; the other, Medwall's *Fyndyng of Troth*. After an eulogistic description of Cornyshe's allegorical device, Collier quotes from the 'singular paper' the following note on Medwall's play, concluding with a facsimile of Cornyshe's signature:

Inglyshe and the oothers of the Kynges players after played an Interluyt whiche was wryten by Mayster Medwell but yt was so long yt was not lyked: yt was of the fyndyng of Troth who was caryed away by ygnoraunce and yprocesy. The foolys part was the best, but the kyng departed befor the end to hys chambre.

Unfortunately there was no trace of this paper in the bound volume, nor is anything known of it at the Record Office, where the documents for this period have recently been subjected to a close scrutiny for the revision of the first volume of the 'Letters and Papers of Henry VIII.' As it could not have any bearing on the business of receipts and payments of which the roll was a record, its insertion does not find a ready explanation. I would suggest, therefore, that

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it is wise to treat the story of the folded paper with suspicion.

It is, however, upon this story with its implied contrast between Cornyshe of the new school and Medwall of the old that Dr. Wallace has rested his thesis; and unhappily his only reference to the folded paper is under the phrase, 'a well known document.'

The wrong done to Medwall has been righted by time. Readers of the 'Times Literary Supplement' will remember the signed article by Dr. F. S. Boas on February 20th, 1919, on the Mostyn Plays then awaiting sale by auction at Sothebys. Henry Medwall's play of *Fulgens and Lucre*s had come to light. It was sold a month later to go to America for £3,400, a figure that does not exaggerate its importance.

Halliwell-Phillips was right after all when he added to the fifth edition of his 'Outlines' in 1885 the note:

The most ancient English drama which is known to exist was written about the year 1490 by the Rev. Henry Medwall, chaplain to Morton, Archbishop of Canterbury, and afterwards printed by Rastell.

As the note does not appear in the fourth edition (1884) it would be interesting, if it were possible, to know whether Halliwell-Phillips saw the Mostyn Plays in 1884, or whether we may yet recover another copy.<sup>1</sup>

The play is one of remarkable interest historically, how interesting may appear from the following account which I am able to give of the source of its plot and the nature of its structure.

A fragment of the play, two leaves in the Bagford collection at the British Museum was facsimiled by the Malone Society, and in 1911 Professor Creizenach announced in the *Shakespeare Jahrbuch* that the source of the plot was apparently to be found in the *De Vera Nobilitate* of Bonaccorso of Pistoja, which he had come

<sup>1</sup> Mr. Seymour de Ricci has since shewn that Halliwell-Phillips knew of the Mostyn Plays. (See *Fulgens and Lucre*s; Intro.)

across in a summarised form. My independent investigation has confirmed Creizenach's note.

Bonaccorso was an Italian humanist, a learned lawyer, a Petrarchan enthusiast, and writer of Ciceronian Latin, as well as of vernacular poetry. He held magisterial office in Florence, enjoyed the patronage of Carlo Malatesta, Lord of Rimini, to whom he dedicated his *De Vera Nobilitate*, and died in 1429, in the same year as his patron.

The subject of Bonaccorso's débat will become clear as we proceed. But it may be explained that the story is a pseudo-realistic romance of Roman life written in the artificial style of a rhetorical exercise in Ciceronian Latin.

Medwall's immediate source was not, however, the Latin of the Italian humanist, but an English version printed by Caxton in 1481, translated by John Tiptoft, Earl of Worcester, from a French version, the work of Jean Mielot, secretary and translator to Philip of Burgundy, printed by Colard Mansion of Bruges, Caxton's collaborator. This Caxton version of Bonaccorso's story of *Fulgens and Luces* I accidentally discovered while examining a Caxton Cicero in 1917 at the Museum. The discovery gave an added interest to the announcement of the sale of the lost play, *Fulgens and Luces*, and I availed myself of the sale-room privilege of turning over the pages of the little quarto.

The Caxton version of *De Vera Nobilitate* occurs in a volume containing Cicero's *Friendship* and *Old Age*, and it is connected with these by its introduction, the three pieces making up Caxton's book. It opens with the words

Here followeth the Argument of the declamation which laboureth to shewe wherein honoure shoulde reste :

Whan thempyre of Rome moste floured . . .

From this argument we learn that Fulgens, a noble senator of Rome had a daughter, Lucesse, of

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'marveyllous beaute,' 'grete attemperaunce of lyf,' 'worshipful conduyt of manners,' 'grete force of wysdom,' and 'plenteous understanding of lectrure.' Lucesse had two wooers, Publius Cornelius, a descendant of the Scipios, of wealth and following, whose 'grete studye rested in huntyng, hauking, syngyng and disporte,' and Gayus Flaminius 'borne of lower stocke' of moderate riches and virtuous manners, whose 'grete studye was . . . to helpe his frende and contrey' but who in time of peace was 'right busye and laboryous in his bokes.' Lucesse submits the decision to her father, who refers it to the senate, before whom the lovers make their declamations at length.

In the Interlude this Argument is summarized in an account given by A to B of the 'substaunce' of the play, the account beginning almost in the words of Caxton:

When thempire of Rome was in such flour

It was too much for the little fellowship of players of interludes to present the Senate in session, so Medwall makes the lovers put their cases to Lucesse. This occupies the greater part of Part II and is solemnly done in rime royal, a distinction reserved for the Roman element in the play; the humours of A and B, on the other hand, are maintained in rime doggerel. Medwall is bold enough to declare for virtuous poverty and give the prize to Gayus Flaminius, whereas Caxton follows the tradition of the *débat* by leaving the verdict open:

As touchyng the sentence dyffynytyf gyven by the Senate . . . I fynd none as yet pronounced. . . . Thene I wold demaunde of theym that shall rede or here the book whiche of this tweyne was moost noble . . . and to him juge ye this noble & vertuous lady Lucesse to be maryed.

Bonaccorso had to consider the feelings of a Malatesta, Mielot of a Burgundy, and Caxton of a 'most drad souerayn.' It was therefore a happy stroke of Medwall's to give the woman's verdict, a privileged decision,



excusable if questioned on a plea of natural affection; it was not the finding of the 'faders conscript.' To compromise on final issues is the wisdom of old men; it is not the way of women. There is something Portia-like in the assurance and competence of Lucre.

We must turn now to the lighter side of Medwall's comedy, the humours of the two boys, A and B, and it is probable that in spite of the interest of the main plot, the humourous underplot in 'rime dogerel' will prove to be of the higher importance. Two boys, A and B, have 'well eaten' at the Cardinal's banquet when B tells A that a play is about to be performed. There is nothing in the world that A loves as much as a Play:

I trow your owyn selfe be oon (he says) of them that shall play.

Nay (says B) I am none.

But B knows the plot, lucky B; and he narrates it to A. The principal actors enter, A takes service with Gaius Flaminius, and B with his rival; and whilst the masters debate their claims to the hand of the mistress, the boys make sport for the lookers on by wooing her maid.

We read in Roper's Life of More, that when young More was in Morton's household, he would 'sodenly sometymes slip in among the players, and never studyinge for the matter, make a parte of his owne there presently among them, which made the lookers on more sport than all the players beside.' Nearly a century later, in the Play of Sir Thomas More, we find More again represented as taking a part among the interlude players who provide a play within the play. It is interesting to find that this particular kind of impromptu adventure on the stage should be found in a play belonging to the period of More's youth, and to the household in which that youth was spent. It is unnecessary to do more here than note this very striking fact.

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Equally striking is the discovery before 1500, in a romantic and entirely secular drama, of a comic under-plot as clearly defined as that of *Twelfth Night* and conceived in the same spirit. We are, in fact, in the presence of a new thing, the first English Romantic play, a play based on an English translation of a French version of an Italian work of fiction, containing an under-plot in which A and B make love to the maid while their masters seek the hand of the mistress. Dr. Boas has pointed out that the method of adaptation anticipates Shakespeare's use of North's translation of Amyot's version of Plutarch's *Lives*. There is reason for hope that facsimiles of the precious little Medwall quarto may soon be available for scholars; we shall then be able to investigate deliberately the full significance of Medwall's Romantic interlude.<sup>1</sup>

In passing from the play to the author, let us first notice that his moral play of *Nature* has probably suffered from Payne-Collier's anecdote. *Nature* is a play of a type that cannot avoid dulness and was soon to become obsolete; the criticism applied to it should be adjusted to the type. We do not, for example, object to Sullivan that his Cathedral music lacks the charm of his Savoyard madrigals and melodies. Yet in *Nature* we find a note rarely heard in the rest of the early Tudor drama.

Who taught the cock his watch hours to obserue  
And sing of courage with shrill throat on high?  
Who taught the pelican her tender heart to carue  
For she nold suffer her little birds to die?  
Who taught the nightingale to record busily  
Her strange entunes in silence of the night?  
Certes! I, Nature and none other wight.

or again :

Pluck up thine heart and hold thine head upright;  
And euermore haue heauen in thy sight.

<sup>1</sup> See *postscript*, p. 31.



It is rare in the early sixteenth century drama to find any expression of poetical feeling, and where we have we have the feeling, as here, it is worthy of note that the metre moves with reasonable ease.

But it will be urged that much of *Nature* is taken up with a very unclerical exposition of the coarse buffoonery of the vices. This is true, but I would draw the attention of my hearers to the admirable picture of Morton and his household in the first part of More's *Utopia*. There we see him, an old man of mean stature, dignified, impressive and gentle, a man who, schooled in the hard life of the civil wars of the fifteenth century, was anything but a recluse.

He took delight many times with rough speech to prove what prompt wit and bold spirit were in every man.

It was in that school of renaissance culture and homely, blunt wit that Medwall flourished and More was trained, and if we would be admitted of their crew, we must not be too critical of their mirth.

Little is known of Medwall. Pitseus says that he was born in England of a very noble family to which he added lustre by his writings and character, that he was greatly beloved by Morton, whose equal he was in integrity and learning, that he left behind him many works which by carelessness had been allowed to disappear, and he mentions only *Nature*. It is unfortunate that Pitseus did not learn more of Medwall from Jasper Heywood, whom he met at Rome, for John Heywood's son must have known more than this of him through his father and his uncle, William Rastell, the printer of *Nature*.

We may add that in 1492, Medwall was presented to the parish church of Balyngthem in the marches of Calais, and in 1493 to the church of Newton in the diocese of Norwich, but did not take up the latter appointment. In February 1501, after Morton's death, he appears to

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have gone abroad, for letters of protection were granted to him for one year. In the following year a successor was appointed to the Calais living, and as we do not hear of Medwall again, it is probable that he was then dead.

We now leave Medwall and turn to one of the most interesting characters of the time of Henry VIII, John Rastell, the printer of *Fulgens and Lucres*. He came of a family whose names appear in the Coventry Leet Book from 1430 onwards. His father was a Justice of the Peace for Warwickshire and one of the Quorum. Much that is interesting might be said of Rastell's connection with Coventry. He was admitted as soon as he was in his teens a brother of the Corpus Christi Guild, and we may assume that his early familiarity with the pageantry of the Midland capital was one of the causes of his remarkable interest in plays and pageants. He was probably educated in London, and possibly also abroad, and while More was at Lincoln's Inn, Rastell was at the Middle Temple. His marriage with Elizabeth More suggests that the Mores and Rastells were on intimate terms. The fathers were both lawyers. Rastell was perhaps introduced while he was a law-student to the circle of the Morton household. It is pleasant to carry conjecture further and think that he too may have been a boy in this household and played A to More's B in Medwall's interlude. He returned after his marriage to Coventry to take up the duties of Coroner and it is on record that he was visited there by More. It was during this visit that there occurred More's remarkable adventure with the friar of Coventry, whose fanatical zeal for the merits of 'Our Lady's Psalter' seems to have confirmed in More a strong antipathy to friars. This friar reappears under a thin disguise in the first part of *Utopia*, and I would suggest that we find him again in the *Pardoner and the Frere*. It will be remembered, too, that William Rastell preserved in the works of his uncle an amusing poem in

the same vein as the last named interlude bearing the title 'How the sergeant would play the friar.'

On the accession of Henry VIII, Rastell who had benefitted considerably by the will of Joan Seamons, widow of an ex-mayor of Coventry, returned to London. He had also inherited property from his father in Warwickshire that he sold late in his life for £260, a sum equivalent in 1914 to about £3000. He entered the service of Sir Edward Belknap, one of the king's most trusted ministers, and was rewarded for his services at home and abroad during the war with France in 1512-3 by the grant of the wardship of the daughters of the wealthy heretic, the merchant-tailor, Richard Hunne. This grant gave him the use of a valuable estate for a term of years and the control of the marriage of the two girls. He had already set up a printing press on the south side of St. Paul's Churchyard, and there between 1513 and 1517, he carried out a really astonishing piece of work in law-printing, the 'Liber Assisarum,' Fitzherbert's 'Grand Abridgment,' and the 'Table of the Grand Abridgment.' The seriousness of this undertaking may be measured by the fact that the price of the Fitzherbert was forty shillings, an amount equivalent in 1914 to over £25. To this period may be assigned also smaller books, printed before he moved to Paul's Gate, including his *Fulgens and Lucrez*, and Linacre's Latin Grammar. But it should be remembered that Rastell printed as an enthusiast rather than as a professional matter of business. He had the missionary spirit in great measure, and the evidence of his several prefaces, which, like his plays, are quite personal in their appeal, shows us that we are dealing with an unusual character.

The Christmas of 1516 saw the end of Rastell's more heroic labours in law-printing. He had published his forty-shilling book in 'three grete volumes.' But the same Christmas had witnessed an achievement of greater

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significance. Thomas More's *Utopia* had been published by Peter Giles at Louvain.

Now Rastell had taken a pleasant property at Monken Hadley, a mile or two from Sir John More's manor house, and there he converted an old tile house into a fair Tudor home, with great windows and striking chimneys, planning and laying-out gardens and grounds that contained five fish ponds. He thus made himself a country house which won the admiration of his guests, notably of one who was entertained there in later years, the king's secretary, Thomas Cromwell. Let us then, to interpose a little ease, picture the Rastells driving over from Monken Hadley to join Thomas More and his family at the Christmas festivities at Gobions under John More's roof tree. There would be Master William Rastell, aged eight, like his grandfather one day to be a judge, and a printer like his father, the editor in days to come of the English works of the author of *Utopia*; there would be his brother John, whose voyage to the New Found Lands in 1535 with Master Hore and a band of gentlemen from the Inns of Court was to be recorded by Hakluyt; Joan Rastell, old enough perhaps to be interested in a lively youth of nineteen, whose dancing and wit, music, mimicry and frankness had won her uncle Tom's heart, 'merry John Heywood.' With her younger sister and her brother John there would be eagerly awaiting them Margaret More, aged ten, a serious little lady, with wondering eyes that had spelled out the verses on *Fortune* that her father had written for the tapestries on the walls of Sir John's hall.

If John Rastell produced a Christmas play fashioned after the Coventry traditions, we may be sure that uncle Tom would 'step in among the players.' But when the little ones were asleep, and the elders drew their high-backed chairs round the log fire, and the needles of the good dames clicked to the chirruping of the crickets, the men would surely talk of the exploits of Raphael

Hythlodaye, adventurer, who sailed with Amerigo to the New World and found Utopia.

John Rastell was as true a venturer as Hythlodaye, he was a projector of schemes, a dreamer of actions. His great printing task was almost over, and now he was bent upon a new adventure. He would go to the New Found Lands himself.

On March 5th, 1516-7, he and two others, London merchants, received Letters of Recommendation from the king which may be read in 'Rymer,' and in July they set out in the *Barbara of Greenwich* and the *Mary Barking*, small vessels of under 200 tons. He took a mixed cargo of frieses, canvas, silks, tukes and other mercery wares, baysalt, hides, tallows, household goods, including feather beds, napery, pots and pans. He took tools for masons and carpenters, 'and other ingynges that he had prepared for the new landys.' Besides the mariners, who were regular naval ratings under the command of two naval officers, Ravyn and Richards, he had thirty or forty soldiers under his personal command, for Rastell had served in France. There were also his own personal servants. Among these was Thomas Bercula, a young printer, then in his service, who, Mr. Gordon Duff suggests, is Thomas Berthelette, afterwards the King's Printer. It will be remembered that printing and paper-making were almost the only new things that Hythlodaye and his comrades were able to teach the Utopians.

Ravyn, the purser, and Richards, the master, had no heart for the undertaking. They ran the ship aground so that she sprang a leak, they remained ashore at Falmouth while the rest of the fleet sailed on to Cork—for this voyage was a concerted and important undertaking under Sebastian Cabot's guidance, according to Sir William Eden. With difficulty Rastell got them as far as Waterford, where, having gone ashore to get a supply of fresh meat, he was bluntly told that the sailors would

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proceed no further, and was advised to fall a-robbing on the high seas. Rastell was compelled to acknowledge defeat, most of his valuable cargo was carried off and sold at Falmouth and Bordeaux, but his prosecution of the mutineers has preserved the story.

On his return to London he wrote and printed his *Play of the Four Elements*, introducing into it the following remarkable passage referring to the failure of his voyage:

*Experience* is teaching *Studious Desire* the use of a chart and instructing him in the elements of cosmography.

*Experience.* This See is called the great Oceyan  
 So great it is that neuer man  
 Coude tell it sith the worlde began  
     Tyll now within this twenty yere  
 Westwarde he founde new landes  
 That we neuer harde tell of before this  
 By wrytynge nor other meanys  
     Yet many now haue ben there.

And that contray is so large of rome  
 Much larger than all cristendome  
     Without fable or gyle  
 For dyuers maryners haue it tryed  
 And sayled streyght by the coste syde  
     Aboue fiae thousand myle.

But what commodytes be within  
 No man can tell nor well imagin  
     But yet not longe ago  
 Some men of this contrey went  
 By the kynges noble consent  
 It for to serche to that extent  
     And coude not be brought thereto.

But they that were the venterers  
 Haue cause to curse their maryners  
 Fals of promys and dissemblers  
     That falsly them betrayed



Whiche wold take no paine to saile farther  
 Than their owne lyst and pleasure  
 Wherefore that vyage and dyuers other  
 Suche kaytyffes haue destroyed.

O what a thyng had been then  
 If that they that be englyshe men  
 Myght haue been the furst of all  
 That there shulde haue taken possessyon  
 And made furst buyldynge and habytacion  
 A memory perpetuall.

And also what an honorable thyng  
 Bothe to the realme and to the kynge  
 To haue had his domynyon extendynge  
 Thear into so farre a grounde  
 Whiche the noble kynge of late memory  
 The moste wyse prynce the VII Harry  
 Causyd furst for to be founde.

Rastell's play is very distinctly influenced by Medwall's *Nature*, but it is in no sense a morality. Its aim is to awaken an interest in natural science as distinct from the somewhat unprogressive department of orthodox theological doctrine. It is the work of an enthusiast of the new age, a man to whom the Renaissance was a call to action, who felt the romantic possibilities of the age of discovery in which he was conscious of living. The stage was for Rastell, like the press, a medium by which he might influence and kindle, or at any rate serve, his generation.

In 1519 the court of Henry VIII underwent a kind of purification. Men of mischievous influence were removed and new men of approved excellence were put into their places. Among these was Sir Thomas More, and with More there came to Court his young protégé, John Heywood, Singer and Player on the Virginals, and shortly after his appointment at Court, Heywood married More's niece, Rastell's daughter Joan. Like the Mores and Rastells, the Heywoods were a legal

family. This fact has been obscured by a mistake of Payne Collier's in identifying Heywood with a yeoman-usher of the same name who appears in the Household Books for 1514, and then of assuming that he had spent his youth at Court as a chorister. There is no evidence that this was the case. Heywood's recorded service at the Court began, as we have stated, in 1519, when More also gave himself up to the royal service. Heywood was one of More's young men like Richard Hyrde, William Roper, John Clements, Walter Smyth, Richard Heywood and William Rastell, youths whose attachment to More and his memory showed in the dark days that followed how close the tie had been that bound them to him in the earlier and happier days. They were discipuli; but the relationship of John Heywood to More is best described by the emphatic word used by Pitseus, *familiarissimus*.

The place of Heywood's dramatic work in the development of the early Tudor drama has been much discussed. Six plays have been attributed to him and commonly accepted as his. Of these he was without doubt the author of three, *The Play of Love*, *The Play of Weather* and *Witty and Witless*, a trilogy of debates. The other three, which also form a group or trilogy, *The Four P P*, *The Pardonere and Frere* and *Johan and Tib*, differ so markedly in theme and spirit from the first group that the traditional canon of the Heywood plays has been questioned. This traditional canon originated in the bookshop of Francis Kirkman in the reign of Charles II. Kirkman issued catalogues of the plays that he collected and offered for sale, and in a prefatory statement he claimed that 'the first playwright was John Heywood who writ seven<sup>1</sup> several

<sup>1</sup> Kirkman attributed Rastell's play of *Gentleness and Nobility* (two parts) to Heywood, counting it as two plays, and omitted *Witty and Witless*, which has come down to us in manuscript. It is interesting to find that Pepys appears to have been a customer of Kirkman's and



plays which he calls Interludes' which make, he adds, 'notable work with the then clergy.'

It is agreed that the comic dialogue, the farcical motive, and buffoonery of the *Four P P* trilogy are French in origin, but it is equally true that they are the work of a good English Chaucerian. They are English plays made after the manner of French Farces, but they are not translations or mere adaptations. They take their motive from abroad, they break in upon the fashion of the allegorical morality, and they give us realistic action and lively dialogue. The writer was to this extent a contributor to the coming of the romantic drama, that he rejected the formal proprieties of the correct moral play and found in French farce and its kindred Chaucerian humour, a release from its tediousness. He anticipated the Romanticists of a later revival by reverting to the past.

As I have argued the problem of the 'Canon of John Heywood's Plays' at some length elsewhere, I may, perhaps, be permitted to state my conclusions and spare you my arguments. *The Four P P* I consider almost certainly to show the marks of Heywood's work, and it is closely related in theme and spirit to the *Pardonere and the Frere*. This latter play, however, and indeed the trilogy of farces of which it is one, are more closely related to what is known to be More's work, than to Heywood's. I suggest, therefore, that More, the author of the letter about the Coventry Friar, whose alter ego appears in *Utopia*, the author too of *How the Sergeant would play the Friar*, not only introduced Heywood to Court, but that Heywood's early success was in no small measure due to this intimacy. It should be remembered that among the works of More recorded by Pitseus is a volume described as *Comædiæ iuueniles*. Printing the

to have made a point of securing the plays attributed by him to the 'first play-writer,' for there exist at Magdalene College, Cambridge, in the Pepysian Library, copies of all the Heywood plays catalogued by Kirkman.

plays in 1533-4, William Rastell might have good reason for omitting the author's name from the *Pardonere and Frere* and *Johan and Tib*, if they were originally More's, yet it would be natural that they should issue from the press along with Heywood's two plays, *Love* and *Weather*. More was sent to the Tower in the year in which these four plays appeared. They seem pathetically to close an old chapter.<sup>1</sup>

But we are dealing with a family group, and I turn again to John Rastell, who in 1520 was engaged by Wolsey to assist in the designs and decorations for the roofs at Guisnes for the Field of the Cloth of Gold. The roofs we are told were large and stately. In 1522, when, the Emperor passed through London, Rastell erected a pageant at the Little Conduit in Cheap near his printing shop at Paul's Gate, where the Peel statue now stands. The following account of the pageant was most kindly transcribed for me by the Master of Corpus Christi, Cambridge, from a College manuscript.

Also att the litill Condytt in Chepe dyd stand a pageant representyng hevyn wt son mone and sterrys shynyng and wt angellys and wt XII apostollys & wt Seynt George, seynt John baptist, seynt Edmund Kyng, Seynt Edwarde Kyng and Confessor, King Henry the VI wt certayn bisshopps saynts off Englund, as seynt Dunstane, seynt Thomas of Cantorbary and

<sup>1</sup> The reference to the loss of the Regent, in the *Four P P*, a disaster which deprived Henry VIII of the largest vessel in his Navy, is capable of a pretty explanation if my suggestion of More's interest in the play is sound. The vessel went down in 1512, some eight years before the play is thought to have been written. Can this date (1520) be reconciled with a reference to a disaster then no longer of recent occurrence? To More and his friends the disaster had not been allowed to pass out of mind. German de Brie, Secretary to the French Queen, had written a poem eulogising the French for their part in the affair of the Regent, and More had retorted in several epigrams which appeared in a collected edition in 1518. Annoyed by this, de Brie replied by a critical exposure of alleged grammatical lapses in More's Epigrammata, and More retorted in an 'Epistola ad Germanum Brisium' in 1520. Both flyters were friends of Erasmus, who interposed in 1520 and stopped the feud.

seynt Erkenwolde, wt the assumption off ow<sup>r</sup> lady mervelous goodly conueyde by a vyce & clowde openyng wt Michael and Gabriel, angellys knelyng and dyuers tymes sensyng wt sensors and wt vyces off yonge queresters syngyng psalmys and ympnys wt shalmys and Organs wt most swetyst musyke that cowed be devysede.

You will notice the astrological character of the device of the heaven, sun, moon and stars. Bale said of Rastell that he surpassed nearly all his contemporaries in mathematical and experimental science, and amongst his writings he mentions a *Canones Astrologici*. It may be presumed that whilst the design and mechanism of the pageant were Rastell's, his son-in-law John Heywood provided the music.

Old Street, which runs eastward from the Charterhouse to Shoreditch Church was an open highway in Rastell's day. Between it and the city walls lay the playing fields of the City, known as Moorfields and Finsbury Fields. In 1524 Rastell leased from the prioress of Holywell Nunnery, one and three quarter acres of ground abutting on Old Street, built himself a house on it, and laid out the grounds. Moreover he erected a stage in the grounds for open-air-plays. I have worked out the site of Rastell's ground in Finsbury Fields and find that it is now occupied by the head office of Bovril Limited. Here then is the site of the first stage known to us in the district that was to be distinguished as the home of the first London theatres. Five minutes walk from Rastell's ground southward brings us to the site of Alleyn's Fortune Theatre and it is not much further in another direction to the site of Burbage's Theatre and the Curtain. Our knowledge of Rastell's stage is not great. What we know, we learn from the pleadings in a Court of Requests Case which has been transcribed by Mr. H. R. Plomer and printed by Mr. A. W. Pollard in his volume of 'Fifteenth Century Prose and Verse.'

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Rastell was a man who felt that he had a mission, and the stage was one means by which he hoped to influence his generation. I have little doubt that his stage in Finsbury Fields was intended for public as well as private performances, and it is surely of no little interest that he built the first stage known to us in a district that was to become famous in the history of the English theatre. Here the new Tudor drama might become known to a wider and more mixed audience, and pass from the confines of the Court, colleges and private houses where custom and fashion hindered free development, to the outer world, where the demands of a less sophisticated sentiment had to be met.

Even admitting that there is no proof that Rastell's stage was intended for public or even semi-public performances, as a private stage its significance is considerable. Private plays were common in his day. This is shown by a royal precept or proclamation of Henry VIII, in Journal 15 of the Town Clerk's Records, which is copied in Letter Book Q. It has not been printed, but for many reasons is of interest. The proclamation attacks the increase of unregulated and uncontrolled dramatic shows in the latter part of the reign, 'now more commonly and bysylie set forthe and played than heretofore hath been accustomed in dyuers and manye suspytyous darke and inconuenyent places' in the city, particularly on Sundays, holy-days and at the time of divine service. It refers to the danger of plague, to the evils that arise when young folk mix promiscuously with idlers, and to the ill effects of such distractions upon the apprentices. So far it is only to be distinguished from later proclamations by the fact that it antedates them. It continues, however, 'His Highness therefore streightly chargeth and commaundeth that no maner of persens from henceforth . . . presume . . . to play . . . any manner of Enterlude or common play within this his Gracis City/onless yt be yn the howses of noblemen ; or of the lorde maire,

Shryues,<sup>1</sup> or Aldermen of the same . . . /orels, the howses of gentlemen or of the substancyall and sad commoners or head parisheners of the same Cyte in the open stretes of the seid Cyte as in tymes past yt hathe been used and accustomed/*or* in the common halls of the companyes.'

The copies of the precept are incomplete, but, probably not much that matters is wanting. Enough is given to show two things, that paternal legislation of the year 1545 was only directed against the pleasures of the young, and that private plays were too important a factor in the success of the entertainments of the 'sad and substantial' elders to be swept away by puritan reformers. The Proclamation is one of many evidences we have at this time that the King had no mind to go down to posterity as a Puritan.

A further point of interest may be mentioned before we leave the question of Rastell's stage and its place in the history of the Tudor drama. When he prosecuted Walton for the theatrical costumes lent to him, and Walton retorted that Rastell owed him money for the erection of his stage, the prosecutor called as one of his witnesses, George Mayler, one of the King's players, who stated that Rastell's costumes were let out on hire by the defendant for *stage plays in summer and interludes in winter*. This distinction of stage plays and interludes is important, as one made by a professional actor who was in the king's service in 1525.

In this year (1525-6) Rastell printed two books that deserve our attention. 'The XII Merry Gestes of the Widow Edyth' was written by Walter Smyth, Thomas More's personal servant, afterwards Lord Mayor's Sword-bearer. It is a humorous poem, based on fact, containing a most interesting episode in the life of the More household. Smyth had a keen sense of fun, and was a true Chaucerian.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> The Interlude in the *Play of Sir Thomas More* was played in his house while he was entertaining his guests as Sheriff.

<sup>2</sup> See 'THE LIBRARY,' July, 1918.

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The other book, the 'Hundred Merry Tales' is the first of a series of Tudor Jest Books, Rastell, I believe, compiled or contributed to the 'Merry Tales,' which in several instances are reminiscent of his earlier associations. To hearten us on our journey let us hear a Coventry tale :

In a vyllage in Warwyckshere there was a paryshe preest and thoughe he were no gret clark nor graduat of y<sup>e</sup> unyversyte /yet he prechyd to his paryshons upō a sonday/declaryng to y<sup>e</sup> xii artycles of the Crede. shewynge them that the fyrst artycle was to beleue in god the fader almyghty maker of heuen & erth. The second. To beleue in Jesu Cryste his onely sone our lorde coequall with y<sup>e</sup> fader in all thynges perteynyng to y<sup>e</sup> deyte. The thyrd that he was cōceyuyd of the holygoost Borne of the vyrgyn Mary. The fourth that he suffred deth under ponce pylate/& and that he was crucyfied dede & beryed. The fyft that he descendyd to hel & set out y<sup>e</sup> good sowlys y<sup>t</sup> were in fayth & hope/and that he y<sup>e</sup> thyrd day rose from deth to lyfe. The syxth he assendyd in to heuen to y<sup>e</sup> ryght syde of god y<sup>e</sup> fader wher he syttyth. The seuenth y<sup>t</sup> he shall come at the day of dome to Judge both us that be quyk and them that be dede. The eyght to beleue in the holy goost equall god wt the fader & the sone. The nynth in holy chyrche Catholyke & in y<sup>e</sup> holy comunyō of sayntys. The tenth In y<sup>e</sup> remysayon of synnes. The leuynth In the ressureccyō generall of y<sup>e</sup> body & soule. The twelfth In euerlastynge lyfe that god shall reward thē that be good. And sayd to his paryshons further y<sup>t</sup> these artycles ye be bounde to beleue for they be trew & of auctoryte. And yf you beleue not me/thē . for a more suerte & suffycyēt auctoryte/go your way to couentre/and there ye shall se them all playd in corpus cristi playe.

¶ By redyng of this tale they y<sup>t</sup> understōde no latyn may lerne to knowe the xii articles of the fayth.

In the month of May, 1527, the king held great festivities at Greenwich in honour of the French Ambassadors and the conclusion of a treaty of alliance. The glories of the Greenwich entertainments are in a sense pathetic, for they were Wolsey's last demonstra-



tion of splendour. As Rastell had been called in to design roofs for the Field of the Cloth of Gold, so again in 1527 he devised a wonderful astrological roof in the banqueting hall and a pageant of *Love and Riches*. There exists at the Record Office a complete and detailed statement of his accounts.

About this time Rastell, who had been assisted by his son William, now 20 years of age, in the Greenwich preparations, printed the plays *Gentleness and Nobility* and *Calisto and Melibæa*. These plays deserve our close attention, for they recall *Fulgens and Lucre*s and show how as in the *Four Elements* the influence of Medwall persisted. The serious motive of *Fulgens and Lucre*s resolved itself into a debate on *nobility*. In *Gentleness and Nobility* Rastell took the theme of Medwall's play, 'wherein honour shall rest,' and transfers the debate to a merchant, a gentleman and a ploughman. The value of the play lies, not in its dramatic power, but in the vigour, boldness and character of Rastell's reasoning. There is no suggestion of romance in the setting, the controversialists walk on and voice their convictions without any dramatic device to account for there being there at all or to explain why the subject should be in their minds.

On the other hand, in *Calisto and Melibæa* we have a purely romantic play, founded on the Spanish tragicomedia, *Celestina*. It is a comedy of romantic intrigue, and like *Fulgens and Lucre*s it is an English romantic play founded on a popular work of fiction of foreign origin.

In a paper, already alluded to, on *John Rastell's Plays*, contributed to 'THE LIBRARY' (January, 1919) I examined *The Four Elements*, *Gentleness and Nobility* and *Calisto and Melibæa*, and there concluded that Rastell's authorship of the first two may be established beyond any reasonable doubt by comparative references to two very striking prose works of his, 'A Boke of Purgatory' and 'The Pastyme of People.'



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For the most part the 'Pastyme' is an abridgment of Fabyan, to whose memory Rastell's son, William, did amends by re-printing him in full in 1533, but it is enriched at intervals by characteristic Rastellian excursions; and even the omissions are illuminating sometimes, as when he refrains from repeating that it was for witchcraft that Jeanne d'Arc was burnt. When we find an aside or critical remark, therefore, in the 'Pastyme,' we hear Rastell speaking, and a repetition in the plays of any of the more remarkable of these intruded passages is of value for our purposes.

In the year 1529, when Rastell compiled his 'Pastyme,' he also produced what is in many respects his most remarkable and characteristic work, 'A Boke of Purgatory.' The circumstances of its origin arose out of a political development that was destined gravely to affect the harmony and unity of the coterie or circle we are considering.

The rise and spread of Lutheranism in England had been unsuccessfully opposed by the oppressive machinery of the Ecclesiastical Courts controlled by Wolsey and the bishops. Tyndale's version of the New Testament was being distributed secretly. New methods of resistance were necessary, and Tunstall, Bishop of London, invited More to read and reply to the literature of Lutheran propaganda. In this way More became involved in the weary business of controversial warfare that was now increasingly to occupy his attention. To Simon Fish's inflammatory pamphlet, 'The Supplication for Beggars,' wherein the doctrine of Purgatory was attacked, More replied defending that doctrine in his 'Supplication for Souls.' Rastell supported his brother-in-law in 'A Boke of Purgatory.' Basing his proof on 'natural reason and good philosophy,' and entirely rejecting all aid from the Scriptures or divine writers, he maintained his thesis in a most original dialogue between a Mahomedan and an Almain.

I must not weary you by citing the numerous parallel passages that may be found indicating that these two prose works were by the same author as the plays. The more striking of these are given in my paper on *John Rastell's Plays*, but the following instances may serve as an example of their kind:

Nobleness is that whyche hath leste nede of foreyne helpe, that is to saye of helpe of any other thyng . . . the cause is more noble than the effect . . . everything that takyth any effect hath nede of the cawse. . . . God is the most noble thing that can be ('A Boke of Purgatory').

Ys not y<sup>t</sup> the noblyst thyng in dede  
That of all other thynges hath lest nede  
As god which reynith etern in blysse  
Is not he the noblest thing y<sup>t</sup> is . . .  
. . . (because he) nedyth the helpe of no nother thyng  
To the helpe of his glorious beyng  
But euery othr thyng hath nede of his ayde.  
(*Gentleness and Nobility.*)

Again, we read in the 'Boke of Purgatory':

Thou knowest . . . that the body of man is . . . all tender and naked . . . ye fysshes haue of theyr nature shelles or skalys to couer and defend theyr bodyes, the bestes be full of here and haue thycke skynnes, the foules haue fethers.

In *Gentleness and Nobility* this appears as follows:

The bestes haue herr & also a thik sken  
The fissh skalys or shells to kepe theyr bodyes in  
The foulis fethers & so euerithing  
Bi nature hath his proper couering  
Saue man himself which is born all nakyd.

But the soul of man is 'intellectiue' and 'hath a more noble and worthy beyng than the brute best whiche hath but lyfe sensytyue'; there are also souls 'vegetatiue' (plant life).

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This fundamental classification appears in the *Four Elements* :

Plantis and herbys growe and be insensate  
Brute bestis haue memory and their wyttes fyue  
But thou has all those and soule intellectuall  
So by reason of thyne understandynge  
Thou hast domynyon of other bestes all.

Again we might cite the following instance from Rastell's chronicle where under the first or Roman section, under the article 'Publius Valerius Publicola' he tells us that when a Dictator's term of office was completed, he was answerable to complaints alleged against him and punishable for offences.

Wold God, he adds, it was so used at this day in the realme of England, that euery iudge and other offycers . . . shold be remouable at iiij or v yere or less and then to answere to all complayntis that shold be allegid agayns him, and to be punished for euery offence that he had committid in his rome, and then ther wold not be so mich extorcione and oppressione of the pore people, no so many iniuries as is now a-days.

This drastic suggestion reappears in the concluding verses of *Gentleness and Nobility* :

But because that men of nature euermore  
Be frayle & folowyng sensuallite  
Yt is impossyble in a maner therfore  
For any gouernours that be in auctoryte  
At all tymys Just & indyfferent to be  
Except they be brydelyd & ther to compellyd  
By some strait laws for them deuysyd.

As thus that no man such rome occupye  
But certayn yerys & than to be remouyd  
Yet that whyle bound to attend dylygently  
And yf he offend & surely prouyd  
With out any fauour that he be ponysshyd  
For the ponysshment of a Juge or offycer  
Doth more good than of thousand other.

Four fifths of *Calisto and Melebeæa* is virtually a translation of the Spanish original, but even here there are marks of Rastell's handling. Thus where the later translator, Mabbe, accurately renders the Spanish 'como la materia apetece a la forma, assi la muger al varō':

as the matter desires the form, so woman desires man,

a proposition common in scholastic philosophy, Rastell seizes the opportunity of intruding his doctrine of *nobility* as implying absence of dependence, need or desire. He accordingly renders it:

matter is less worthy Than the forme, so is woman to man surely.

It is certainly remarkable to find *apetece* or 'desires' wrested into 'is less worthy than,' and to find further that the explanation is to be found in Rastell's 'Boke of Purgatory,' and *Gentleness and Nobility*.

To multiply parallel instances would not be difficult, but time forbids and it would be a dull business. I would emphasise, however, in passing, the importance of *Celestina* in *Calisto and Melebeæa*, for in her we have the prototype of the Nurse in *Romeo and Juliet*. More called her 'the baude mother of naughtynes' and that Rastell was of More's opinion is sufficiently shown by the violence he does to the Spanish story in providing his interlude with a moral and edifying close on the education of children. He spoils the story, but he discloses his identity to us in doing so.

Finally we may add that as the *Four Elements* shows the influence of Medwall's *Nature*, so *Gentleness and Nobility* and *Calisto and Melebeæa*, point back to *Fulgens and Lucres*. The former takes up the theme of Nobility and debates it on ultimate Rastellian principles, the latter seizes a tale of Romance fiction and gives it a dramatic setting.

The political and religious unrest to which we have already alluded again claims our attention. Wolsey fell

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in 1529 and More succeeded to the chancellorship. Rastell became a member of the Reformation Parliament, as member for a Cornish constituency, and from this time the ways of the two men diverged. Rastell was absorbed gradually into the service of Thomas Cromwell, devoting his fertile resourcefulness and ardent enthusiasm to a cause that raised in More an increasing spirit of antagonism. More doggedly worked away at his controversial tracts, but the divorce and the question of the king's supremacy found him the official defender of a cause that was officially being deserted.

Meanwhile William Rastell, John Heywood and More's young friends clung faithfully to him, and this chapter on the origins of the early Tudor Romantic Drama, closes appropriately with the publication by William Rastell, 1533-4, the year of More's imprisonment, of the plays of John Heywood along with those that I have ventured to associate with More himself, the *Pardonere and Frere*, and *Johan Johan*. More was executed in 1535, and John Rastell died in prison a year later, contumaciously urging that the clergy should work for their own living and that tithes and offerings should be abolished.

The tragic circumstances that led to the estrangement and deaths of More and Rastell, had the effect of postponing the spontaneous development of the Renaissance spirit in England, nor was this development fully resumed until the need for national unity was felt in Elizabeth's reign, and the first violence of the Reformation had burnt itself out. In some ways the delay made the development more rapid and striking when it came, but we must feel regret that the fine spirit of More's influence and the eager and generous idealism of his disciples were quenched in a national religious feud.

The conclusion of my argument then is this. In *Fulgens and Lucres* and the plays printed by the Rastells we have a body of early secular drama informed by a

new spirit. This new spirit may be traced to the household of Morton. It was the spirit of liberation, romance and variety, looking abroad for new dramatic material, and finding it in Italy, France and Spain. Of this new school Medwall appears to be the head. Rastell was Medwall's disciple as well as printer, but in Rastell's own work there is displayed an almost ill-balanced eagerness to assume the role of the philosophical guide. No such charge can be brought against his son-in-law, John Heywood, whose satire is at all times tempered by the spirit of laughter. To many it will seem bold to give to More a place in the development of this drama, but I am confident that my suggestion is not lightly to be set aside. This new drama was checked by political circumstances before it had quite freed itself from the trammels of the moral interlude, but it pointed the way to the Romantic Drama of Shakespeare much more definitely than any body of work that followed it for the next fifty years, and I believe that in studying the origins of the Elizabethan drama we do not err in attaching a new and great importance to the interesting group of men with whom I have dealt to-night, Medwall, More, the Rastells and John Heywood.

#### POSTSCRIPT

SINCE this paper was read, Mr. Henry E. Huntington, the possessor of the quarto of *Fulgens and Lucrez*, has very generously published a facsimile reprint of his unique treasure with an introductory note by Mr. Seymour de Ricci. My references to this Interlude, made before the facsimile, might have been amplified, but the paper appears as it was read to the members of The Shakespeare Association. Copies of the facsimile may be had in London from Messrs. Quaritch, 11 Grafton Street, W.

A. W. R.

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